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ABSTRACT

Preservice teachers could conduct indepth interviews with one or more experienced teachers during the undergraduate program to obtain realistic information about the first year of teaching and the personal and professional changes teachers undergo as they continue to teach. This information would be useful to the preservice teachers in confirming the career choice to enter teaching and also would help minimize disequilibrium beginning teachers may experience when they confront the realities of the job. The interview could be an optional or a required part of any course in the teacher preparation program. Instructors for these courses should provide interview guidelines for the preservice teachers. A sample guideline for an interview is appended. (JD)

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Interviews with Experienced Teachers: A Reality Base for Preservice Teachers

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Interviews with Experienced Teachers: A Reality Base for Preservice Teachers

First year teachers often must make significant adjustments when they recognize that their preconceived expectations do not match the reality of teaching. Preservice teachers could conduct in-depth interviews with one or more experienced teachers during the undergraduate program to obtain realistic information about the first year of teaching and the personal and professional changes teachers undergo as they continue to teach. This paper will discuss the rationale for the teacher interview and provide procedural suggestions.

Rationale for the Interview

Information obtained in interviews with experienced teachers would enable preservice teachers (1) to explore and confirm their career choice and (2) to have a realistic view of the teaching career and aspects of the job.

Even after four years of college training, including student teaching, many teachers begin their first year not knowing whether teaching is the best career choice for them. This uncertainty is consistent with Super's (1975) description of the exploratory stage of career development. With more information available about the teaching career obtained through interviews with experienced teachers, some preservice teachers may switch majors to explore other careers before finishing their teacher preparation programs. Thus, information about the teaching career obtained through an interview may help some individuals self-select out of teaching. Those who continue in the teacher education program would presumably be more certain of their career selection and have more commitment. The dropout rate in the early

years of teaching also would likely be lower.

Information obtained in the interview would enable the preservice teacher to have a realistic view of various aspects of the job. Detailed information about the teaching career obtained in the preservice program may help minimize disequilibrium problems which first year teachers experience. Ryan, Newman, Mager, Applegate, Lasley, Flora, and Johnston (1980, pp 3-8) discussed the problems first year teachers sometimes have when they deal with the imagined and the real in teaching. Eddy (1969) also discussed the complexities and difficulties encountered by beginning teachers as they attempt to make the shift from university student to public school practitioner. Masling and Stern (1963) suggested that a high rate of attrition will continue as long as potential teachers are allowed to see only the "tinsel and glitter" of teaching without knowing some of the inevitable realities.

Emmingham (1981) indicated that the educational community is failing to bring new practitioners into the profession with their eyes open. Teachers need to know that the pressure is great and that the money is not. Emmingham said that public leaders have created a "myth of fulfillment" that has enticed unsuspecting, unqualified college students into teaching. These students experience a transition shock when they meet the job reality in their first year of teaching. Others have discussed these transition concerns (for example see the Journal of Teacher Education, vol. 32, May-June 1981).

Interviews with experienced teachers would enable prospective teachers to know what is demanded of them and would help dispell some of the "tinsel and glitter" and the myths related to the teaching career.

A growing body of research indicates that teachers have different job skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and concerns at different points in their careers (e.g. - Burden, 1979, 1980; Fuller, 1969, Fuller and Bown, 1975; Newman, 1978; Peterson, 1978). Studies also show that many of these changes follow a regular developmental pattern. Therefore, teachers in their first year may have a predictable set of developmental characteristics; fourth year teachers, for example, have an equally predictable, but different set of developmental characteristics. Preservice teachers may not expect that their attitudes, concerns, skills, and needs would change over time -- but they do. An interview would enable the preservice teacher to recognize some of these developmental characteristics.

Stanwood (1978) suggested that an interview is a viable alternative to written term papers when exploring careers.

Procedural Suggestions

One or more interviews with experienced teachers could be conducted by preservice teachers at various points in the teacher preparation program. The objectives of the interviews might vary depending on the student's level in the program. An interview conducted during an introductory course might focus on the overall view of the teacher's career. Interviews conducted in later courses might focus on certain aspects of teaching such as teaching methods or teaching philosophies. The interview could be an optional or a required part of any course in the teacher preparation program, but logical choices would be introductory courses, methods courses, sociology courses, or student teaching seminars.

Instructors should provide interview guidelines for the preservice teacher. These guidelines could include: (1) a list of interview objectives, (2) tips

on how to contact a teacher, (3) tips on how to prepare for the interview, (4) tips on how to conduct the interview, and (5) tips on the preparation of a summary report. A sample interview guideline sheet is provided in Appendix A.

An interview conducted early in the preservice program might focus on how the teacher has changed personally and professionally from the start of teaching to the time of the interview. Specifically, sample questions could be provided which center on changes in (1) job skills, knowledge, and behaviors; (2) attitudes, satisfactions, needs, and concerns; and (3) job events such as changes in grade level, school, or district and involvement in committees and other school activities.

Students can be responsible for finding a teacher to interview. The teacher may be one who the student has worked with in some capacity as a teacher aide or assistant, a former teacher, or perhaps the cooperating teacher for a friend who is student teaching.

The student should decide on a series of questions before the actual interview. Tape recording the interview (with the teacher's permission) is an advantage because it enables the preservice teacher to concentrate on the questions and answers and eliminates the need for note taking.

The interview guidelines provided by the instructor also could include some suggestions for conducting the interview. For instance, a general question such as "What was your first year of teaching like?" is often helpful at the beginning of an interview because it allows the teachers freedom to express a wide range of ideas which they feel are important. Questions about each successive year would follow along with any questions about specific issues which the preservice teacher might wish to raise.

Sample questions might include the following:

1. What was your first year of teaching like?
2. How was your second year of teaching different?
3. Have you taught basically the same since you started teaching?
4. How do you obtain new ideas?
5. Did your problems in teaching change over the years?
6. What suggestions would you have for a first year teacher?

A written summary report could organize the information in verbatim transcripts, thematic headings, or chronological order. One section of the report should allow the preservice teacher to draw conclusions and analyze the interview information obtained.

After the preservice teachers have completed the interviews and summary reports, it may be helpful to discuss the findings in the college class.

Conclusions

Preservice teachers could conduct in-depth interviews with one or more experienced teachers during the undergraduate program to obtain realistic information about the first year of teaching and the personal and professional changes teachers undergo as they continue to teach. This information would be useful for the preservice teachers in confirming the career choice to enter teaching and also would help minimize disequilibrium beginning teachers experience when they confront the realities of the job. The interview could be an optional or a required part of any course in the teacher preparation program. Instructors for these courses should provide interview guidelines for the preservice teachers.

Appendix A

Guidelines for Interviewing a Teacher

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1. Interview Objectives

   The main purpose of the interview is to obtain information about how teachers change from the time they start teaching to the time of the interview.

2. Contacting a Teacher

   You select a teacher and conduct the interview at a time convenient to both of you. You could interview the teacher you are aiding with this semester. A friend of yours might be teacher aiding or student teaching and you might arrange to interview one of those teachers. You might prefer to interview a teacher you had in elementary or high school.

3. Preparing for the Interview

   You might consider tape recording the interview. In this way you can concentrate on the questions you will ask and the answers given. Also, tape recording the interview will free you from jotting down notes during the interview.

   You should prepare a list of questions you intend to ask. Some sample questions are:

   A. What was your first year of teaching like?
      (After the teacher has provided an extended description, then follow up with additional questions to seek clarification or to find out information on topics that the teacher didn't first mention.)
   B. How was your second year of teaching different?
   C. Have you taught basically the same since you started teaching?
   D. How do you obtain new ideas?
   E. Did your problems in teaching change over the years?
   F. What suggestions would you have for a first year teacher?

4. Conducting the Interview

   It usually is best to start the interview with a general question like "What was your first year of teaching like?" because it allows the teacher to say a lot about ideas that may be important to him/her.

As you get further into the interview, you can follow up with more detailed questions which focus on certain aspects of teaching. For instance, after the initial general questions on changes in the first, second, third, and later years, you might ask questions that deal specifically with discipline, student characteristics, planning, or some other area. Feel free to ask questions that you think of spontaneously during the interview.

5. Preparing the Summary Report

Your summary report should have at least three parts:

A. Introduction - Include information such as the teacher's name, name of school, number of years taught, grade level(s) taught and number of years at each grade level. Include any pertinent demographic information.

B. Body - This is the main part of your report. You can organize the information you obtained in your interview in one of several ways: chronologically (with heading such as first year, second year, etc.), topically (with headings such as changes in attitude, discipline, changes in teaching techniques, etc.), or with a series of questions and answers. The use of topical headings is often the most successful.

C. Conclusions - Draw some conclusions about what you learned from the interview. Also, include some statements about your development as a teacher based on what you learned in the interview.

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